

4. Bullying and Personal Safety (including Dealing With Difficult Worksite Managers)

Non-sexual harassment behaviour is common in our society. Bullying, discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and vilification behaviours are all expressions of violence against others. They have an unwelcome and potentially unlawful, negative impact on individuals and communities in our society.

While racial vilification, victimisation, and certain discriminatory behaviours are unlawful, other forms of non-sexual harassment and bullying are not covered by legislation.

Bullying means to seek out or deliberately target another in order to cause the victim distress, humiliation or to take advantage of them for the benefit of the bully.

Similarly, bullying can be defined as the treatment of any person that is **harmful, intimidating, humiliating or embarrassing** and which is aimed at making the victim feel miserable, demoralised and lacking in self confidence. It is the intentional use of power, force or information in a way that **denies the victim their right to fully participate and engage in a work environment with confidence.**

Workplace bullying takes many forms, and some examples include abusing workers in front of workmates; persistent complaints and criticisms on trivial matters; withholding important information; spreading false rumours; excluding individuals from workplace social events; not speaking to them, or holding a person up to public ridicule. It is often the repetitive nature of behaviour that makes bullying distinct from other forms of discrimination.

Unfortunately there is not adequate legislation to protect workers against bullying when this behaviour is presented as being 'status blind'. For example, someone may be ostracised or bullied at work because of their race, but the slurs or harassment they undergo may not be racially specific. Therefore their process of redress of this behaviour is limited under the current legislation.

Women have been identified as being the most likely victims of bullying behaviour. On occasion the bullying is perpetrated by a woman in the position of supervisor to the victim.

While there is no legislation covering bullying behaviours, there are many defences against bullying which members can employ. Often, (depending on your state or territory), departmental policies, Equal Opportunity legislation or even Occupational Health and Safety policies can provide a framework for redress or at least precedents which can inform your situation. Because these avenues will differ, however, it's important to contact your union, as it can cite the most appropriate avenue for you.

Most important, however, is that you DO act upon the bullying you are facing. Don't go it alone. It's not up to individual women to "be the strong ones" against colleagues or students who insistently use stand over tactics or condescending behaviour to assert power. The behaviour is INTENDED to make you feel powerless but you AREN'T. As with many forms of harassment, women rarely report what is happening to them and thus decision makers cannot accurately assess the extent to which it is a problem.

Check List of basic options - Occupational Health and Safety: trained representatives; appropriate policies are in operation and promoted/accessible; OHS Committees are formed and meets regularly. Student Behaviour Management: agreed policy promoted and implemented; student misbehaviour is managed consistently across the school; relevant identification and staff oversight of students whose behaviour may pose a risk. Managing Grievances: agreed procedures; policy is regularly published for parents; codes of conduct/protocols established advising parents and students about appropriate ways to behave toward each other, staff and other students; democratic decision making. Active Sub-Branch: regular union meetings held; relevant training attended; union notice board in used/ visible space; bullying standing items/reports; progress reported/celebrated via sub-branch communication with school council. Training and Development: union training for staff in legal, legislative and OHS matters.



What Can I Do?

Activism around Bullying and Personal Safety

KNOW and USE grievance and harassment procedures. Policies and procedures are only as good as they are USED in PRACTICE. If employees have little faith or knowledge of how to stop bullying when it is occurring, (thus using grievance procedures for redress of a situation) then the employer has not placed enough importance on its responsibilities to do so.

Report bullying when it occurs to you, or to someone else in the workplace, and speak up at workplace meetings if you are aware of bullying or intimidation tactics being used by anyone over women. Bullying should be a workplace concern for all employees and the employer should also ensure it is not an invisible issue.

So if you or a colleague or a student is being harassed or bullied, some steps you can take are:

- make comprehensive notes of all incidents-time, place, witnesses, what was said/done
- talk to your colleagues about the alleged bullying to avoid the tendency of victims to internalise the issue and allowing it to grow
- seek support and assistance from your supervisor. If your supervisor is the bully, seek support from the person who supervises the supervisor
- attempt informal resolution of the issue by approaching the alleged bully, providing them with the opportunity of correcting their behaviour
- contact the union office for assistance and advice
- discuss your situation with your doctor, reporting psychological/stress related injury due to workplace bullying
- submit incident reports and ComCare claims if you are unable to return to work because of the workplace stress
- contact your employer's psychological services provider
- lodge a claim under anti-discrimination legislation if appropriate

Ask your union if they are running any relevant union training on the subject of bullying and/or harassment, or mediation etc.

Nominate to become involved in Occupational Health and Safety representative/teams at your workplace.

